Sleep habits and complaints of adults in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, in 1987 and 1995

Abstract

This study compares the prevalence of complaints of insomnia, excessive diurnal sleepiness, parasomnias, and sleep habits of the adult population in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, estimated in surveys carried out in 1987 and 1995. Representative samples of 1000 adult residents per survey were interviewed using a validated structured sleep questionnaire, the “UNIFESP Sleep Questionnaire”. Difficulty maintaining sleep, difficulty initiating sleep and early morning awakening, occurring at least three times a week, were reported in 1987 and 1995, by 15.8/27.6, 13.9/19.1, and 10.6/14.2% of the interviewees, respectively, significantly increasing throughout time. These sleep problems were more often found among women. Frequencies of excessive diurnal sleepiness and sleep attacks were unchanged comparing 1987 with 1995 (4.5 vs 3.8 and 3.1 vs 3.0%, respectively). Parasomnia complaints remained unchanged, with the exception of leg cramps, which doubled in prevalence from 1987 to 1995 (2.6 to 5.8%). Snoring was the most common parasomnia (21.5% in 1995), reported more often by men than by women, and somnambulism was the least common (approximately 1%). Besides sleeping slightly less, interviewees went to bed and woke up later in 1995. Approximately 12% of the subjects in both surveys had consulted a physician due to sleep problems and 3.0% reported habitual use of sleep-promoting substances in 1995. Overall, there was a significant increase in insomnia complaints from 1987 to 1995 in the general population of the city of São Paulo. This major change over a little under a decade should be considered as an important public health issue.

Introduction

Sleep disorders, particularly insomnia, adversely affect quality of life, performance, memory and concentration, increase the risk of accidents and are associated with psychiatric and medical conditions such as heart disease and chronic pain and increased mortality rates (1,2). Although sleep disorders are recognized as a public health problem (2), information on their epidemiology is still limited when it comes to changes over time. Data from South America are scarce when compared to the knowledge accumu-